

Madame Mao

To conclude the series of works made following his stay in the Existential Retreat, Bakker turned to a subject much surrounded with negativity: Madame Mao was Chinese chairman Mao Zedong's last wife, (in a historical coincidence with Nieuwenhuis, also his fourth wife) and was also a mother who committed suicide. After his trip to China in 1978, Bakker became interested in Madame Mao, and she became the research subject of his residency in Chongqing in 2014/15. This is hardly surprising, since she fits so well with his earlier preoccupations with historical women who were close to powerful men, and with the history of his own mother's suicide.

As the fourth and last wife of Mao Zedong (from 1938 until his death in 1976), Jiang Qing—Madame Mao's official name—was not a woman who stood in the shadow of her husband, one of the most remarkable figures in modern history. She managed to become one of the most unpopular, unwanted figures in Chinese history and a major scapegoat for most of her husband's disastrous policies.¹ In Chinese society she has the reputation of being something like the modern equivalent of a witch, or a “Hitla”, as one of the Chongqing residency employees called her.

Bakker treats the subject of Madame Mao—an infamous and volatile subject in China—with much more affection than one might expect considering the negative image of Madame Mao. Bakker does not focus on Jiang's loathsome role in the Cultural Revolution, a role she herself would later describe as “Mao's dog”. Instead, he attends to her later career as an actress, the early days of her marriage to Mao, her enthusiasm for and skill as a performer of popular dances such as the waltz, the foxtrot and Yangge, which, partly thanks to her, became popular in communist China, and the relatively popular operas she commissioned to replace all other forms of theatre culture during the Cultural Revolution. Jiang Qing—or any of the many other names she used in life—takes centre stage in each of Bakker's works. She often appears in the guise of Bakker's model, but her presence nevertheless pushes her otherwise omnipresent husband into a subordinate position.

Bakker's *Madame Mao* works follow the chronology of Madame Mao's career. *Hotpot with Lan Ping and the Bachelor from 1937* takes the format of the film *The Bachelor*, in which Jiang Qing appeared in 1937 (under the pseudonym of Lan Ping), a year before moving to Yan'an, where Mao and his army were stationed. Bakker's drawing portrays the staff of the Chongqing residency at a hotpot dinner table. Hot pot is a popular dish in the city, but has



Because of censorship, Madame Mao is referred to as Shumeng, her child's name, on pages 39 and 41.

毛夫人

作为对“存在主义者的撤退”之后的创作的总结，贝克尔选择了一个极富消极色彩的主题：“毛夫人”是中国国家主席毛泽东的最后一任妻子（也是他的第四任妻子，与纽文休斯生活于同一时代），而她也是一位自杀的母亲。贝克尔在1978年到过中国，那时他就对毛夫人产生了兴趣，2014-2015年他来到中国重庆驻留，期间将其作为研究对象。这并不令人感到意外，他之前就一直对位高权重的男人身边的女人很感兴趣，也对他母亲自杀的那段历史异常着迷，毛夫人正合他口味。

作为现代史上最显赫的人物毛泽东的第四任，也是最后一任妻子（从1938年到1976年毛去世），江青——“毛夫人”的正式名字——并未被她那可算当代史上风云人物之一的丈夫的光芒所遮蔽。她成为了中国历史上最不受待见、最为人憎恶的人物，也为大多数她丈夫所制定的灾难性政策充当了替罪羊。¹在中国社会，她被视为现代版的女巫或“女希特勒”，正如重庆驻留处的一位工作人员所说。

“毛夫人”在中国是个敏感而不名誉的话题，虽然她的形象如此负面，但贝克尔对“毛夫人”这个主题的处理却十分富于感情。贝克尔没有把重点放在江青在文化大革命中的可鄙角色——她后来将自己形容为“毛主席的狗”，而是放在她演员生涯的后期，她与毛泽东婚姻生活的前期，她对后来因她而风靡共产主义中国的华尔兹、狐步舞、秧歌等流行舞蹈的热爱和在其中表现出的才华，以及文革中她誓要以其取代其他一切戏剧形式的风靡一时的样板戏。在贝克尔的每幅作品中，江青——她一生中还用过许多别的名字——都占据着中心地位。她常化身为贝克尔的模特儿，而她的出现使她那平时总是无所不在的丈夫光芒黯淡。

贝克尔的《毛夫人》系列作品以其职业生涯为时间线索。《跟蓝苹和1937年的“王老五”一起吃火锅》取材于电影《王老五》，1937年，即江青前往毛泽东及其军队驻地延安的前一年，她出现在这部电影中（艺名蓝苹）。贝克尔画下了重庆驻留处工作人员晚餐吃火锅的场面。火锅在这座城市广受欢迎，但与历史人物江青并无关联。贝克尔对一个在中国争议颇大的人物如此着迷，驻留处的工作人员对此有着非常矛盾的态度，这顿火锅与此相关。

与在“存在主义者的撤退”中不同，在重庆，这位艺术家遭遇了中国式的对表达自由的限制，在该国，许多行业最终都受到国家和共产党的管制。这里的艺术家可分三种，其主题和遭遇也大有不同。一种是效忠于国家和共产党的“红色艺术家”；一种是“灰色艺术家”，可以自由行动但不被官方认可，更加关注国际艺术市场；还有一种可称为“黑色艺术家”，常因进

nothing to do with the historical figure of Jiang. Instead it has every-thing to do with the residency staff's ambivalence towards Bakker's preoccupation with a figure still so controversial in China.

Unlike his Existentialist Retreat, the Chongqing experience confronted the artist with the limits of freedom of expression in China, where many businesses ultimately fall under the control of the state and the Party. In a country where artists can be divided into three categories, topics and their reception can be divided. There are the Reds, who are commissioned by the state and the Party; the Greys, who can do what they want but without any official recognition, and they are most likely to focus on the international marketplace; and the Blacks, who attract the suspicion of the gov-ernment for their “undermining activities”.² Given the vague bound-aries of these categories and the ambiguous responses they can trigger in different viewers, Madame Mao is not exactly a good sub-ject for artists to celebrate, especially if they depend on the Chinese government to make a living.

The next two works show the happy, revolutionary couple in 1938 and 1945, where they lived after the Long March, near or around Yan’an. They appear self-assured and smiling, but their clothes indicate a slight shift in atmosphere from the mundane to the militant. This shift has been accomplished in the 1947 work, representing the period just before Mao takes over the country. In this work they both wear the dull Chinese uniform and already appear estranged from one another mentally. In the background we see a map of Mao’s Yang Jia Gou residence, which had a large bomb shelter for protection in the war with the Guomindang.

Two more works from this series focus on the style of dance that Jiang popularised among the communist ranks. One drawing shows a contemporary street dance, a scene in which Jiang herself figures in the background, dressed in the Maoist costume of the Cultural Revolution. A second work, *Pear Garden*, reveals the com-plexity of her situation during her time with Mao. Bakker exagger-ates the situation through his positive/negative lens, but he basically stands up for the otherwise hated chairman's wife. This work is set in one of the pear gardens near Mao's residences in Yan’an. In fact, there are no pear gardens in this region, so the pear garden of the title refers to a dreamy Chinese opera setting. Pear garden was also the term used to describe the sceneries used in the form of dance popularised by Jiang in Yan’an. In their later life, in the 1960s and 1970s, the once happy couple (with kids) were living apart. Mao was often seen enjoying the company of pretty concubines

行“破坏活动”而引起政府的怀疑。²类别之间界限模糊，面对不同对象他们的表现也会不同。“毛夫人”对艺术家，尤其那些依靠中国政府谋生活的艺术家来说，不是一个好主题。

接下来的两幅画，画的是幸福的革命夫妻在1938和1945年，那是长征之后，他们住在延安附近。这幅作品画的是1947年，毛泽东掌握中国大权前不久。在画里，两人都穿着灰暗的中国军队制服，已经显出了彼此精神上的疏离。在背景中，我们能看到一幅地图，上面标出了毛泽东在杨家沟的驻地，那儿修建了一个很大的防空洞，供他们躲避国民党的空袭。

另两幅画聚焦于一种由于江青的推行而风靡共产党各阶层的舞蹈。一幅画的是时下街边的群舞，江青出现在背景中，穿着文化大革命时期的毛派制服。第二幅画《梨园》揭示了江青与毛泽东关系的复杂性。贝克尔通过他积极/消极的透镜，对形势作了夸张，但基本上他是站在为世人所憎的主席妻子这一边的。作品背景是延安毛泽东居处附近的一个梨园。实际上当地并没有一个种满梨树的花园，所以标题中的“梨园”指的是一种梦幻的中国戏曲背景。“梨园”也被用来指江青在延安推行的舞蹈中所使用的舞台布景。在他们往后的日子里，20世纪60和70年代，这对曾经幸福的夫妻（他们还有孩子）一直分居。常有人看见毛泽东身边陪伴着从军队文工团中挑选出的漂亮情妇，然而这些事实是不会正式向大众披露的。在《梨园》中我们看到年迈的主席正和一个年轻的裸女跳舞，而这个身着红衣的女人，江青，没有与任何人共舞，除了作者佩德罗·贝克尔。

在他的《毛夫人》系列画作中，贝克尔描述的不外是爱——或至少是强烈的感情，对这个中国历史上最为人憎恨的人物的爱。他维护这个女人，她在政治上的贻害远远不如其夫，却被看作邪恶的象征，永世不得翻身。人们乐于恨她，因此我们不难想象贝克尔的《毛夫人》系列作品在中国的公开展出引起了怎样的争议。

尽管贝克尔选择主题的倾向非常明显，他总是将有些模糊的史实与他个人的执迷混合在一起，但《毛夫人》系列作品还随着若干历史性的巧合。譬如1978年贝克尔的中国之行——在邓小平的改革开放政策之前，那时四人帮大审判的全国播报刚刚过去了两年，在该审判中江青被判处死刑（但刑罚从未执行，她一直被囚禁，直到1991年自杀）。还有更多的巧合。贝克尔在《政治性的画》中回顾的纽文休斯时代的乌托邦精神及其以梵·高遇害为象征的惨痛终结，与毛泽东的政治生涯及乌托邦幻想的破灭相映成趣。1921年被共产党第三国际派到中国，帮助当时还仅是地区势力的中国共产党进行专业化发展的共产党员汉克·斯利威利耶特是荷兰人。斯利威利耶特化名马林，他判定毛泽东是个有望成为党派领导的人才。就在那时，乌托邦精神经历了一次决定性的转折，它带来的复杂结果（乌托邦精神与反乌托邦的事实结果）造就了今天的中国必须面对的历史的一部分，正如荷兰仍在努力设法应对梵·高遇刺之后一个全新定义的全球化社会的挑战。弗朗西斯·福山对历史终结的宣告略嫌太早，但在历史之外的某处，贝克尔正以艺术创作探索着历史未定的边界，以及塑造历史的乌托邦/反乌托邦、善/恶的二分法。

selected from the army’s entertainment ranks, but this was not knowledge officially sanctioned for the public. In *Pear Garden* we see the aged chairman dancing with a naked, young woman, and a woman in red dress, Jiang Qing, dancing with none other than Pedro Bakker himself.

In his *Madame Mao* drawings, Bakker narrates nothing less than feelings of love—or at least strong affection—for one of the most hated people in Chinese history. He represents and stands up for a woman whose politics were ultimately far less destructive than her husband's, but whose status in China as an emblem of evil seems set in stone. She is someone people love to hate, which makes it easy to imagine some of the arguments against the public showing of Bakker's work on Madame Mao in China.

Although a trend in the choice of subject matter is clearly discernible in Bakker's work, whereby he constantly mingles more or less obscure historical facts and events with his own preoccupations, the *Madame Mao* body of works is surrounded by histori-cal coincidences. For example, Bakker travelled to China in 1978—before the open door policies of Deng Xiaoping and just two years after the nation-wide broadcast of the famous trial of the Gang of Four at which Jiang was sentenced to death (a sentence that was never carried out; she was imprisoned until she committed suicide in 1991). More coincidences turn up. The utopian spirit of the Nieuwenhuis era and its traumatic ending with the Van Gogh murder, which Bakker evokes in *To Draw Politically*, finds an inter-esting parallel in the career of Mao and the collapse of the utopian dream. It was the Dutch communist Henk Sneevliet who was sent by the Comintern to China in 1921 to professionalise the then still marginal Communist Party. Under the pseudonym of agent Maring, Sneevliet identified Mao Zedong as a possible suitable party leader. The utopian spirit of the day took a decisive turn, and the ambiguities that came with it (the utopian spirit mixed with dysto-pian results) today form a part of the history that China has to cope with, just as the Netherlands is still trying to come to terms with the challenges of a newly defined global society after the assassination of Van Gogh. Francis Fukuyama announced the end of history a little bit too early. But somewhere on the outside of history, Bakker is creating art that explores the undefined borders of history, and the dichotomies of utopian/dystopian and good/evil that shape it.

^[1] I draw my Mao and Madame Mao history mainly from: Jung Chang and Jon Halliday, Mao, The Unknown Story, 2005.

^[2] 我对毛氏夫妇的故事的了解主要来自于2005年出版的张戎、江·哈利代《毛:不为人知的故事》。

^[2] With thanks to Prof Dr Hans de Wolf of the Vrije Universiteit Brussel, who suggested this categorisation during a private tour of the exhibition “Chinese Utopia’s Revisited”, Bozar, Brussels, 28 July 2015.

^[2] 感谢布鲁塞尔自由大学的汉斯·德·沃尔夫在为我解说2015年7月28日博萨艺术中心举办的《中国乌托邦重临》展览时建议采用此分类法。

^[1] Madame Mao Jelle Bouwhuis

^[2] 毛夫人 耶勒·包豪斯

^[3] Madame Mao Jelle Bouwhuis

^[4] 毛夫人 耶勒·包豪斯

^[5] Madame Mao Jelle Bouwhuis